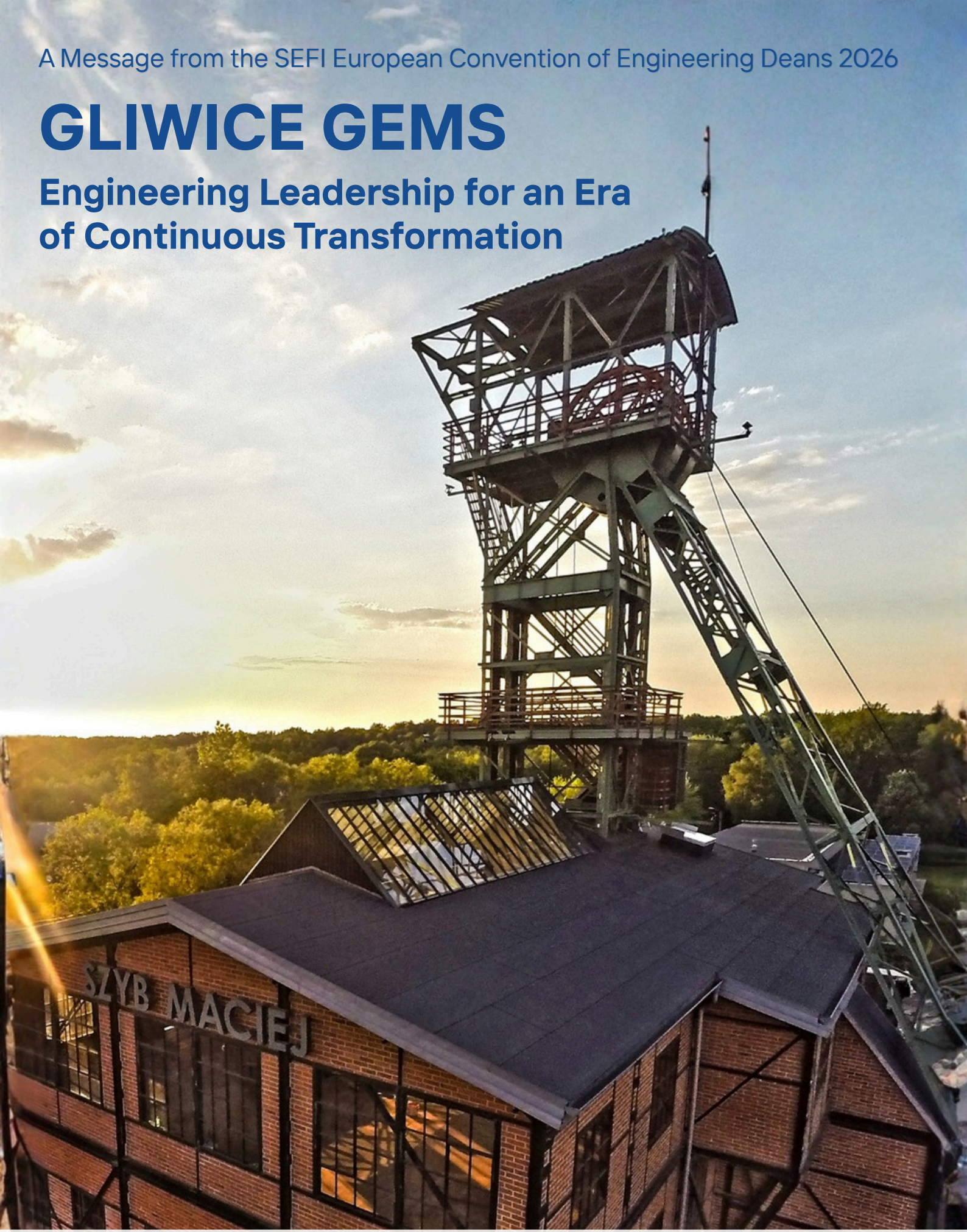
A Message from the SEFI European Convention of Engineering Deans 2026

GLIWICE GEMS

Engineering Leadership for an Era of Continuous Transformation



Silesian University of Technology

SEFI

European Society for Engineering Education
Europäische Gesellschaft für Ingenieur-Ausbildung
Société Européenne pour la Formation des Ingénieurs

ABOUT THE HOST:

THE UNIVERSITY AS A LEADER OF REGIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The Silesian University of Technology (SUT) is located in Gliwice, Poland, one of Europe's most industrialised regions, historically shaped by heavy industry and now undergoing a dynamic transition towards advanced, technology-driven sectors. This unique context enables SUT to operate at the intersection of engineering education and real industrial transformation.

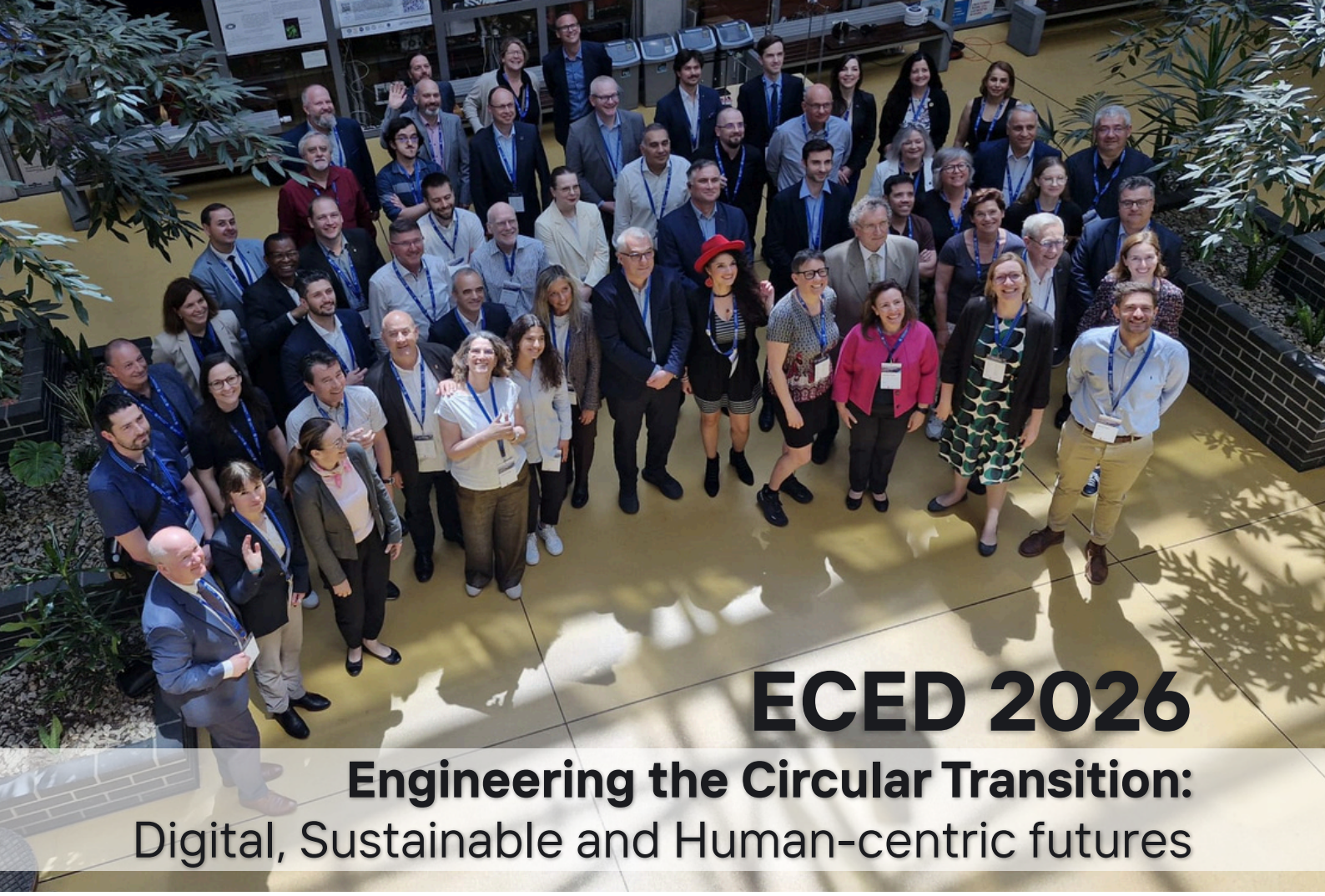
The University maintains extensive and structured cooperation with industry, particularly through partnerships with companies within the Katowice Special Economic Zone (KSSE), ranked among the best investment zones globally and recognised as the leading one in Europe. These collaborations go beyond standard engagement, involving joint curriculum development, industry-based student projects, internships, and dual study programmes. Collaboration with global industry partners, including Boeing, is an integral part of SUT's educational and innovation ecosystem.

SUT's educational environment is closely aligned with industrial practice — laboratories are equipped with real production technologies, and industry experts actively contribute to teaching. This creates a learning model where engineering education is directly embedded in contemporary industrial reality.

SUT has also actively contributed to SEFI initiatives, including hosting a SEFI Regional Event in 2025 within the IX Dual Education Conference (EDUAL), dedicated to transforming engineering education and strengthening industry–academia collaboration.

SEFI would like to thank Prof. Wojciech Sitek and his team at SUT for their extraordinary efforts in organising the 2026 European Convention of Engineering Deans.

Photo Credits: Szyb Maciej (cover), Silesian University of Technology



ECED 2026

Engineering the Circular Transition:
Digital, Sustainable and Human-centric futures

The SEFI Engineering Deans Convention 2026, hosted by the Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice, Poland, between 25-27 May 2026, brought together engineering deans, university leaders, industry representatives, students and stakeholders from across Europe and beyond to discuss the changing landscape of engineering education and leadership.

The Convention took place at a time of profound technological, societal, environmental, and geopolitical change. The accelerating development of artificial intelligence, the urgency of sustainability transitions, demographic shifts, and increasing global uncertainty are transforming not only engineering practice, but also the role of engineering schools and their leaders.

Participants agreed that engineering education institutions must not merely react to change: they must actively shape it.

> *Engineering education is a strategic investment in Europe's ability to act.*
>
> **VIRGINIJUS SINKEVIČIUS** - MEP, FORMER EU COMMISSIONER
> OPENING KEYNOTE SPEAKER

1. The New Normal of Continuous Transformation Requires New Competences

Engineering schools operate in environments characterised by rapid and often unpredictable change. Institutions can no longer expect periods of stability between successive waves of transformation.

The transformation currently underway extends beyond students. Academic staff, institutional leaders, and professional services must continuously develop new skills and ways of working.

Engineering educators and leaders increasingly need:

- digital and AI literacy;
- change leadership capabilities;
- interdisciplinary and intercultural competences;
- the ability to work effectively in environments characterised by uncertainty.

Continuous professional development should therefore be recognised as a strategic priority for engineering education institutions.

Adaptability itself is becoming a core competence. Rather than waiting for periods of stability, institutions must learn to operate in a state of continuous transition.

2. People Are the Key Enablers of Transformation

Participants emphasised that people remain the most valuable resource of engineering schools.

While investment in infrastructure and equipment remains important, participants emphasised that sustainable transformation ultimately depends on people, and long-term institutional resilience depends fundamentally on investment in people, leadership, organisational culture, and staff development.

Engineering schools must therefore:

- prioritise staff development and lifelong learning;
- create supportive environments for academic and professional staff;
- recognise and reward change leadership;
- enable experimentation and innovation within institutions.

Future success will depend less on physical assets and increasingly on institutional cultures that empower people to adapt and thrive. Human capacity development is less visible than investments in laboratories or facilities, yet it is essential for institutional resilience and innovation - investment in people is the most strategic investment. Transition cannot be achieved by policy alone.

3. Universities Are Uniquely Positioned as Trusted Network Builders

Engineering schools occupy a distinctive position within society. They combine deep local engagement with extensive European and global networks, with an inherent mindset of being open to collaboration across borders. Universities act as trusted intermediaries connecting industry, governments, researchers, students, and society.

Through these connections, institutions can:

- mobilise diverse expertise;
- facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration;
- provide neutral spaces for dialogue among stakeholders;
- disseminate and scale innovative practices.

However, global challenges manifest locally, and solutions must remain sensitive to local contexts. Effective solutions must therefore combine international collaboration with strong regional relevance and responsiveness.

Engineering education must simultaneously be globally connected and locally engaged.

4. Trust Is Essential for Effective Partnerships

Strong partnerships between universities, industry, and society are built on trust.

Participants recognised that different sectors often define trust differently. Universities traditionally build trust through continuity, independence, and long-term credibility, while industry may associate trust with responsiveness, agility, and timely delivery.

Participants stressed the importance of recognising these different expectations and investing deliberately in relationship-building, both at an individual and organisation level.

Face-to-face interactions remain particularly valuable. Bringing leaders together in dedicated spaces such as the Deans Convention strengthens relationships, facilitates mutual understanding, and creates the conditions for long-term collaboration.

Commitment and consistency are how relationships work.

HONORATA HENCEL
MANAGING DIRECTOR, POLAND AND UKRAINE, BOEING GLOBAL

INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA ALLIANCES PANELIST

5. Different Sectors Operate on Different Timescales

One of the strongest messages emerging from the Convention was that universities, industry, governments, and students often work according to fundamentally different conceptions of time.

Universities frequently operate within long institutional cycles and traditions, while industry may require rapid responses to immediate challenges. Governments work within electoral cycles, and students experience change over the duration of their studies.
The question is no longer whether change will occur, but how rapidly institutions can respond while maintaining their core missions and values.

As engineering education faces accelerating technological developments, particularly in artificial intelligence, leaders must recognise these differing temporal perspectives and develop partnership models that acknowledge and accommodate them.

Universities and industry have different clocks, even though they tick at the same frequency.

XAVIER FOUGER
SENIOR DIRECTOR, GLOBAL ACADEMIA PROGRAMS, DASSAULT SYSTÈMES

OPENING INDUSTRIAL PANELIST

6. Mobility and Exchange of People Should Be Strengthened

Participants suggested that partnerships should extend beyond exchanging reports, publications, or project outputs. Greater movement of people between academia and industry can significantly strengthen mutual understanding.

Examples include:

- staff exchanges;
- Internships;
- industry secondments;
- practitioners joining universities;
- academics spending time in industry settings.

Such exchanges help bridge differences in language, culture, and working practices, while fostering innovation and shared problem-solving. Effective partnership can feel like working in liminal spaces (neither academic nor industry) and these spaces can enable creative work to be done.

Diversity of experience should increasingly be viewed as an institutional asset, with engineering education systems recognising and valuing diverse career pathways and professional experiences.

7. Engineering Education Must Remain Profoundly Human

The rapid development of AI and digital technologies raises profound questions about the future value proposition of engineering education.

As artificial intelligence and digital technologies increasingly undertake technical and routine tasks, the distinctive contribution of engineers will lie increasingly in uniquely human capabilities, including:

- creativity;
- critical thinking;
- curiosity
- ethical judgement;
- communication and collaboration skills;
- empathy and societal awareness

Engineering education must continue to place human development at its centre. The future engineer will not simply be a technical expert, but a reflective professional capable of working effectively with both people and intelligent technologies.

8. Academic Leaders Need Space for Strategic Reflection

Growing operational pressures are increasingly limiting opportunities for long-term strategic thinking. Participants recognized the need to consciously preserve time for:

- strategic reflection;
- long-term institutional planning;
- anticipation of emerging trends;
- dialogue with peers.

Communities of practice such as the SEFI Engineering Deans Convention provide essential spaces for peer exchange, collective reflection, and leadership development.

Universities can't respond by just being faster.

MÁRIA SZALMÁNÉ CSETE
DEAN, BUDAPEST UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMICS

LEADERSHIP DIALOGUE PANELIST

A CALL TO ACTION

Participants in the SEFI Engineering Deans Convention 2026 call upon:

Universities and engineering schools to:

- invest systematically in the continuous development of staff and leaders ;
- strengthen human-centred approaches to engineering education;
- create institutional cultures that support innovation, adaptability, digital and AI literacy, change leadership capabilities, interdisciplinary and intercultural competences and collaboration;
- preserve strategic capacity in times of increasing operational pressure;
- have both global connections and local engagements;
- develop partnership models that acknowledge and accommodate differing temporal perspectives;
- recognise and value diverse career pathways and professional experiences.

Policymakers to:

- support long-term investment in people as well as infrastructure;
- recognise the strategic role of engineering education in addressing societal challenges;
- promote policies that facilitate face-to-face interactions, cross-sector collaboration and mobility;
- provide stable frameworks that enable institutions to innovate while remaining responsive to societal needs.

Industry and external partners to:

- deepen collaboration with engineering schools through long-term partnerships focused on mutual value creation;
- support staff and student mobility across sectors;
- co-create educational innovation that responds to both societal and industrial needs.

Looking Ahead

The discussions in Gliwice reaffirmed that engineering schools have a crucial role in shaping sustainable, resilient, and inclusive futures. The participants realise that this means that their schools will need to evolve in a well-considered manner, and they are prepared for and committed to the change. To fulfil this mission, engineering education institutions must remain globally connected, locally engaged, strategically minded, and deeply committed to people.

In an increasingly uncertain world, engineering schools will continue to play a vital role—not only in educating future engineers, but also in shaping resilient, innovative, and humane societies.

Adopted at the European Engineering Deans Convention, Gliwice, Poland, May 2026

Edited by Prof. Euan Lindsay (Aalborg Universiy)
Chair of SEFI European Engineering Deans Council

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